are met with everyday. So we stood there and exclaimed over the birds which nonchalantly continued their feeding.

Continuing along the bund, we notched up a few Redvented Bulbuls, Whiteheaded Babblers and Roseringed Parakeets. A family of Mynas alighted on an electricity pole nearby and the antics of the stubby-tailed youngster brought a smile to the lips as it sat there, teetering gently in the breeze, seemingly almost on the point of falling but never quite getting there. Further up, we encountered other small birds of the bushlands. Ashy Wren Warblers were sporting in the bushes, accompanied by Tailor Birds, singing raucously in the bushes. There were also a few other little chaps around, but I am hopeless at identifying these LBJ's and prefer to put them down in the list just as LBJ's and have done with it! Sorting out the length of the third primary feather and the thickness of the beaks is not for me – and I have no hesitation in admitting it.

Swallows and Swifts sported in the air. One of the Common Swallows flew so close that we were able to see a small loose feather in the snowy-white shirt front! The spotless white plumage would have made a detergent manufacturer weep with joy!

Further up there was a surprise. We were watching a half-dozen or so Redwattled Lapwings running around in the fields when a large wader appeared. It alighted at the water's edge but was immediately set upon by a nearby Pond Heron. Taking fright at this attack, the wader swerved off and landed on a small patch of unattended shallow water. He immediately proceeded to wade around in the water which, at times, came almost up to his belly, so that he gave a very curious impression of actually swimming. We peered at the chap through the binoculars and hotly contested identity. At times it appeared as something and at times as something else. The problem was that we were only carrying Collins pictorial guide with us. The other books were in the car, which was now quite some distance away. So we noted as many of the features as we could and then legged it back to the car to establish identity. Based on the notes and plumage, we identified the chap as a Bartailed Godwit. I understand that this species is not found in the region so this becomes a notable sighting.

Near the car, a trio of Indian Rollers was disporting in the air. Mindful of the fact that European Rollers are also sometimes to be seen in Hyderabad, we took a close look, but the birds were obviously Indian Rollers. A Black Drongo nearby watched these antics disapprovingly. An Iora called and Green Bee-eaters flashed around. A Pied Bush Chat put in an appearance, along with a couple of Indian Robins – causing some confusion. We were speculating on the absence of Shrikes when a Brown Shrike appeared; silencing our complaints.

Eventually, we decided to start back. Hot chicken patties and cool water and then into the car, headed for the village, where we hoped to find a *chaiwallah*. We were not disappointed in this and we found a chap who specialised not only in *chai*, but also in hot *mirchis*. Much refreshed, we headed back, being stopped en-route by a soaring Blackheaded Snake Eagle (Short-toed Eagle to the old timers...). Further up, we heard Painted Partridge calling. And that set the seal on the end. Not a great day's birding, but a wonderful day in the bush. If only more people realized that weather is no deterrant to birding. In fact, rainy days bring out the best – and that itself is a great incentive not to miss a rainy day's birding.

ANNUAL GENERAL BODY MEETING OF THE SOCIETY: Held on 22nd August 2005, at Vidyaranya School, Hyderabad

Members of the Society assembled at the Vidyaranya School at 6.00 p.m. Even at 6.30 p.m. the Quorum of members was not present so the meeting had to be adjourned under rule 26 of the Rules and Regulations of the Society. The meeting was again called to order after 15 minutes and, as per the rules, whatever the number of members present would constitute a proper Quorum.

The President gave his annual report of the work of the Society and also projected the future course of action that the Society and its members need to formulate to wake the society from its slumbers and to put it back on the rails. All the activities of the society, field trips, indoor meetings, lectures and slide shows seemed to have become individual efforts rather than member activities. As you can see, this month there is no indoor meeting and till such time as proper programmes can be planned and organised, the activities of the society would continue to decline. It is indeed sad to think that more than 25 years after its inception, the BSAP is still struggling with everything; whether it is organising field trips or indoor meetings or printing its newsletter PITTA, or the Journal MAYURA. If it goes on like this, there will not be much to write about or to do, and all the recognition and acclaim that the society has attained, and the real work put in, thanks to its hardworking, motivated and dedicated members would be in vain. It is a sad reflection that even for its AGM, a proper quorum was not present.

The meeting proper started and the society accepted with regret the resignation of four of its senior and active members. While Aasheesh Pittie, Raajeev Mathew and S. Ashok Kumar gave personal difficulties as the reason to continue as Executive Committee members, Kiran K. had left for the U.K. and was thus unable to serve on the EC. Four members were proposed for the E.C. and duly elected. They are C. Bhaskar Rao, Nand Kumar, Sheetal Vyas and Humayun Taher.

The Hon. Secretary gave a brief report and also the Hon. Treasurer presented the accounts. The meeting ended with thanks to Mr. Ram Babu, Vidyaranya School, the Auditors Gandhi and Gandhi, AP Forest Department and other project sponsors. The Auditors Gandhi and Gandhi have been again appointed for a further period of 2 years.

Project: The members were apprised of the ongoing Telugu translation work given to the society, for translating the book BIRDS OF SOUTHERN INDIA, by Grimmett, R; Inskipp, C and Inskipp, T. The work is almost over and the manuscripts have to be put on CD and sent for final printing.

The Executive Committee again met at the house of Susheel Kapadia on 2.10.2005. The following office bearers have been elected:

1) Siraj A. Taher	President
2) M. Shafaat Ulla	Vice-President
3) C. Bhaskar Rao	Hon. Secretary
4) Susheel Kapadia	Hon. Treasurer

Sheetal Vyas was proposed for handling the programmes of the society in the media and she accepted this and agreed to do the work. Nand Kumar, M.S. Kulkarni and J.V.D. Moorty would look after the procuring of funds for society projects. Siraj A. Taher agreed to take up the matter of arranging for Indoor Meetings as and when they are planned.

Column: Urban Birding

By The City BirdBrain

I'm not quite sure if the species that I propose to discuss in this episode can qualify for an urban species. However, since the name of the bird is suggestive of such, perhaps I can be excused for taking it as an urban species. Besides, I happen to have seen a small flock the other day, hawking insects quite happily in the late evenings, in the vicinity of the office. So we will devote this month to the study of that interesting bird, the House Swift.

These are most entertaining birds. In appearance, they resemble little bows, complete with arrows fitted! And their tiny beaks are forever questing for midges, flies and other assorted insect life. All day, they are on the wing, in quest of various delicacies that would appeal to the gourmet House Swift. And now that they seem to have moved into the city, they appear to have a still greater variety in their diet. One disadvantage of this is, of course, that they have to put up with a considerable amount of pollution. But they are willing to put up with it for the advantage of the variety in their diet.

The bill of these birds is a perfect apology, but their gape is very wide. It has to be, as they prefer to do most of their eating in the air. Such a habit, if performed by one with a small gape, would cause onlookers to raise their eyebrows at the appalling table manners. The House Swift solves the problem by maintaining a gape of considerable size and this appendage helps it to swallow its food in full flight without scandalizing onlookers with its table manners.

Not only is the bird very compact looking, it's home too is cozy. They build under balconies and in small nooks and corners of old buildings. The nest is composed almost entirely of small feathers and straw and is held in place with the birds' saliva. The entrance is constructed between the wall and the nest cup. Here the birds line their home with soft down and raise a brood of huge gaped, ever-hungry chicks. How the parents manage to find enough time during the day to satisfy the appetite of their ever-hungry offspring is a mystery to me. But they seem to do it with remarkable aplomb.

I remember in the days of long ago, when I was much younger than I am now, a House Swift was brought to the house. I cannot now recollect how it got here, but the problem with it was a broken wing. For a bird that survives entirely in a state of flight, this was a quite serious injury. Swifts spend almost the entire day on the wing, so the loss of one wing almost certainly means death for the bird. With us, perhaps it would have a chance of survival.

The first problem that presented itself was where to keep the bird. A Swift's feet are very strangely constructed. All four toes point forward. So the bird is incapable of perching in the true sense. We solved this problem by getting a cane-backed chair. Placing the bird on it, we found that it would cling to the cane webbing quite easily and, in this rather strange posture, it preferred to live. So that solved the problem of lodging. The boarding, however, was also a matter of some interest. How to feed it...? And what to feed it? Flies suggested themselves – there was a sugarcane juice vendor near the house and the crushed stalks of sugarcane attracted hundreds of flies. I invested in a couple of flyswats and made hourly visits to the sugarcane stall, where I swatted several dozen flies, much I may add, to the amusement of the vendor and his several customers, and carried them back in a small tin box and, with the aid of a pair of small tweezers, fed them to the bird, as it hung on the back of the chair. The bird eventually managed to get over its broken wing, but before we could find out if it would make a successful return to the wild, a cat had a very conclusive interview with it.

Since Swifts have very special feet, with all their four toes pointed forward, they cannot perch and they are therefore forced to hang from edges. Consequently, you will never see them perched on telegraph lines as do their cousins, the Swallows. This lends a certain amount of ungainliness to their appearance when at rest. But see the same bird on the wing, and you will never believe that it is the same chap that was hanging so precariously from the edge of the nest. In the air, a Swift is just that – swift and most elegant. They simply swim through the air!

Perhaps the major enemy of these birds is the Hobby. Other predators simply do not have the speed necessary to catch these birds, though they sometimes put in a few vain attempts. Having said that, there is a record of a Kestrel having caught a House Swift once. I wasn't there when this happened, but the incident was reported in a British birding magazine which, I regret to report, I seem to have mislaid and now I cannot even recall the name of the excellent journal. But generally speaking, even the Hobby has its work cut out in trying to catch one of these birds for its dinner. The Swifts are fast birds and are quite capable of outflying even this, the swiftest of the falcons.

There was a time when the nests of these birds were collected, to supply the Chinese kitchens with the ingredients for birds' nest soup. Chinese seem to specialise in delicacies that bring the natural world into grave danger! Be that as it